

Back to the Gospel: Seeing Beauty

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you - unless you believed in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:1-2)

Centrality of the Gospel

This pretty much sums up the new sermon series we are going to be starting today - “Back to the Gospel”. Let me read that text for you again... Now I would remind you brothers... of the gospel I preached to you..... which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word - that is, the GOSPEL - unless you believed in vain.. If you fail to be gospel centred in your spiritually.. Paul warns us - you believed in vain...

So the WORD that Paul is calling us to HOLD FAST to is the GOSPEL... which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved. Past. Present. Future.

You received the gospel. Past. You stand in the gospel. Present. You are being saved by the gospel. Future. You never outgrow your need for the gospel.

OR, another way to put it is - we are saved by the gospel. past. We are safe in the gospel. present. And we are being saved by the gospel. future.

Saved by the gospel. Safe in the gospel. Being saved by the gospel.

The Goal of the Gospel

This word gospel - it comes from the Greek word “evangelion” which is best translated - good news.

Its good news because God sent His one and only Son to die for our sins to save us FROM eternal judgement... BUT MAINLY, the gospel is GOOD NEWS because it RECONCILES US - reunites us TO God. What makes the gospel GOOD news is that we are saved towards something... or SOMEONE who IS good.

And so... for the next three weeks, we are going to talk about the gospel... but not just something we AFFIRM or acknowledge.. but something that is BEAUTIFUL.

Look it. It is NEVER enough just to agree with the truth. The Bible tells us that Jesus is the Son of God and He is Lord and Saviour! AMEN - even demons believe that and they tremble! They fall down on their faces before the KING...

But that is NOT enough to save. We NEED to LOVE the truth... 2 Thessalonians 2:10 says that the wicked will perish because they refuse to LOVE the truth and so be saved...

So we need to LOVE the truth. To be saved by the gospel... we need to LOVE Jesus, who is the truth, the way, and the life... Love Him so much that the gospel is GOOD NEWS because you get Jesus! Not prosperity, not health and wealth... not even freedom from sin and hell... BUT JESUS. And Him alone.

And so herein lies the problem... We need to LOVE Jesus. We need to LOVE the gospel! But how can we LOVE that which we cannot see?

Would you turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Cor. 3:12-18. That's 2 Corinthians 3:12-18.

Now the climax of today's message is going to be near the very end of the message as we look at verses 16-18 but I want to camp out here in verses 12-15 and really flesh out what Paul is saying ... Because, what you ought to hear happening as I preach today is this tension building and building up until it finally reaches a climactic resolution at verses 17 and 18... So let me just read verses 12-15 again - as to have them fresh on our minds... (read)

The glory of God in the face of Moses...

Do you guys remember that dramatic scene in the book of Exodus when Moses comes down from Mount Sinai after having beheld the glory of God? After spending 40 days without food in the Lord's presence, He comes down and we read that his face was literally RADIANT. SO much so, that the nation of Israel feared to look upon Moses' face... And so they requested that his face be covered with a veil because the glory radiating from his face was just too much to handle. Now what's striking here is that Paul is drawing a parallel with that event and the hardness of heart for all those who fail to see Christ in the Scriptures...

He writes in v.14 - But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant/ or old testament, that same veil remains unlifted, because only

through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts...

And let me just point out that Paul was writing to the early church back when they did not have the New Testament. Their Bibles were made up of the Old Testament books - of which the 5 books of Moses - the TORAH, was held in special reverence - so much so that the Jews sometimes referred to the entirety of the Bible in shorthand form as the writings of "Moses" - or "the LAW".

So here's what Paul is doing for us here. It's really brilliant actually. Paul is drawing a contrast between the Israelites who wandered for 40 years in the desert with everyone who can read the Bible... Not just the Jews, but with everyone who has access to the Word of God. So on the one side we have Moses and the Israelites and on the other side, we have Jesus and everyone who has access to the Bible.

And here's the contrast...

VS. The Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ

On one hand - unlike the ministry of Moses, which was limited, temporary, veiled, and lacking transformative power, the ministry of Jesus is characterized by an all-surpassing, eternal, unveiled, and transformative power. And the point in drawing the contrast this way is to show the superiority of Jesus' ministry over and above that of Moses' ministry...

But here's the catch.... Paul also tells us that just as the nation of Israel in the past failed to look upon the glory of God in the face of Moses.... so he now turns to rebuke all those who study and read the Word of God but fail to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Do you see the contrast? The Israelites failed to see the glory of God in the face of Moses, but how much more pitiful are those who read the Word of God and fail to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ?! - who the author of Hebrews tells us is THE radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His divine nature.

Another point of contrast is that Paul tells us that the Israelites under Moses were unable to behold the glory of God in the face of Moses because they set a veil over his face.... but how much more serious is the problem when that veil is not outside of us on someone's face, but inside of us...in our hearts? It says here that those who fail to see the glory of God in Jesus Christ as they read the Bible have VEILS over their hearts that are preventing them from seeing God's glory... that's scary. I

mean... IF the veil were on your face.. If the veil that the Bible is talking about was on my face or your face.. I could just reach over and rip it off... But the SCARY thing is „, is that this veil is covering our hearts and our minds... and the effect is that to this day - v. 14 our minds and hearts are hardened SO THAT we CANNOT see the glory of God in Jesus Christ as we read the Bible.

How many of you, when you read the Bible, when you talk with other believers.. when you worship God corporately on Sunday... I wonder how many of you are deeply discouraged as you are find that you aren't really seeing more of Jesus.

Now, I can appreciate that there are seasons when the Bible is dry and bland and our prayer life experiences drought... BUT... if this is your attitude toward the Bible for most of the year... if you are reading it and all it is is BORING BORING BORING... and you CANNOT see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and DELIGHT in it... then fear and tremble and cry out to God for mercy... because ... there most certainly is a veil over your heart... one that no one can remove and do anything about except for God...

And so... that's where Paul goes in v. 16.. He says, But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed... Now... VERY simple sentence - and easy to glance over, but let me just draw your attention to this simple verse by asking you a question. When the Bible is boring. When praying is not real. When you don't love God. How HARD is it for you to turn to the Lord. Come on. Anyone? How HARD is it for your heart to turn to God when you find His Word and communication with Him through prayer BORING?

I'll tell you the answer... ITS VERY HARD. ITS IMPOSSIBLE TO TURN TO GOD when you delight in STUFF more than God, much less when you find His Word BORING and don't even read it. And must I remind you about just how frightening this VEIL thing is? The Israelites wandered around in the desert for 40 years and they failed to enter the PROMISED LAND and THEIR BONES WERE ALL BURIED IN THE DESERT!!! THAT'S SCARY! So how much more if we neglect such a greater salvation than that of Moses, how much more do we who have access to not just the Old Testament but the New Testament, how much more will we who fail to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ suffer more harm than those who merely failed to see the glory of God in the face of Moses.

So. this veil problem. Its scary. It's A REAL PROBLEM. And if the description of the BORED Christian who is not interested in reading their Bible sounds a bit like you.... you have every right to feel a tad uncomfortable right now...

And because this veil lies in our HEARTS of all places... we do not have the freedom to remove it in and of our own strength. We can't just reach in with a scalpel and REMOVE IT...

Verse 17. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom. The answer to the veil problem - the answer to the hardened heart problem, is a new heart given to you by the Holy Spirit. There are many places in the Bible that talk about this but let me just take you to one in particular - Ezekiel 36:26 and following... I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules... what Ezekiel is getting at here is the picture the NEW BIRTH or the SECOND BIRTH that Jesus talked about with Nicodemus in John 3.

The answer to the veil problem is a new heart. You either HAVE IT or you don't. Are you BORN AGAIN or are you still dead in your sins? Now this might be an overly simplified explanation to a deep and rather complex question... BUT it does get at the root of the issue. To see beauty in the gospel, you need to have been born again. You either have the new heart or you don't.

When you SEE this... when the Holy Spirit does a work in your life to lift the veil over your hearts... SO THAT YOU CAN SEE... SEE SEE SEE the beauty of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ... the question is not ... so what's your decision? The question is: what do you see.... Do you SEE Jesus Christ in the gospel as being more BEAUTIFUL and VALUABLE and PRECIOUS than ALL that this life has to offer?

You don't decide to love Jesus Christ.. that's not the way it works... if you take me to a movie and I think it is BORING and you tell me to decide... DECIDE... that's not what you do when you SEE something... you don't decide... you either see it, or you don't. You either see it as boring... or you behold BEAUTY... IS Jesus BORING to you or is he LOVELY and BEAUTIFUL???

So let me ask you all today....right now...where do your hearts land? You hardly even need to think about it. IS your heart GLAD and THANKFUL towards God for sending His Son to die for your sins and for sending His Spirit to create in you new hearts which have the capacity to DELIGHT in God's glory... or are you just

bored? Or perhaps you are feeling a bit uncomfortable. A bit scared even... because as you are looking back at your life, you see that regardless of how long you have attended church... the life you are living seems to match up pretty well with the description of a person with a hardened and veiled heart... If you are in that place this morning... pray to God now even as you are listening to me talk, pray to Him and confess your sin and helplessness to Him and ask Him for help. And either myself or pastor Tak would be more than glad to talk more with you and pray with you after the service or during the week...

Conclusion

But moving on now... to my last point... its just going to reinforce the IMPORTANCE of seeing the beauty of Jesus Christ even more... v. 18... And we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

2 points I want to highlight here and then we are done. ‘

First is the Law of the Soul. I've talked about this in many different ways and I'll sati again...

The Law of the Soul: It goes something like this. We WATCH what we love, and we become like what we WATCH. It's like when two couples spend lots of time together and their appearance and mannerisms and demeanour becomes like the other persons so much so that the people around them begin to comment how alike they are... Or its like how a young boy who dreams of playing in the NBA watches videos of Michael Jordan on youtube.... This is the law of the soul: we end up watching what we love and we become more and more like what we watch. The point is... if our desire is to become more and more like Jesus, we have to see Him more and more but in order to see Him, we have to love Him and to do that, we need new hearts that are able to see BEAUTY in the gospel..

Secondly, this whole “sanctification” thing. Too many people misunderstand what true sanctification is. In light of everything that I have said so far... let me just quickly give you a working definition of what sanctification is. But first here's what SANCTIFICATION is NOT. Sanctification is NOT primarily about fighting SIN. Sanctification is NOT primarily about even reading your Bible more and praying more. So what I'm saying is that sanctification is not primarily about DO-

ING. RATHER, sanctification is primarily about SEEING. SANCTIFICATION is the FIGHT for SIGHT! Sanctification is the fight FOR SIGHT in order that we might DELIGHT, FOR WE WATCH WHAT WE DELIGHT IN, and WHAT WE WATCH, WE BECOME LIKE. I'll repeat that... Sanctification - or the FIGHT for HOLINESS, is the FIGHT FOR SEEING MORE OF JESUS, THE FIGHT FOR SIGHT, SO THAT WE MIGHT DELIGHT IN THE GLORY OF GOD, BECAUSE WE WILL WATCH WHAT WE DELIGHT IN AND WE BECOME LIKE WHAT WE WATCH. In other words, as we behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to the next. Do you want your life to reflect the glory of God? Do you want to share in His glory and participate in it? Then make war against your flesh as you cast aside every weight and sin which gets in the way of you SEEING Jesus and take up the word. And start reading. and pray... God, help me to see Jesus.. help me to see His beauty as I read Your Word...

Let's pray.

Father.